

Fire Safety in Student Housing

Office of the
State Fire Marshal
<http://www.wsp.wa.gov/fire/firemars.htm>



A guide for fire safety in dormitory and university housing.

In cases where fire fatalities occurred on college campuses, alcohol was a factor. There is a strong link between alcohol and fire deaths. In many adult fire fatalities, victims were under the influence at the time of the fire. Alcohol abuse impairs judgment and hampers evacuation efforts.

1 Prevention – Remember prevention is your best defense against fire.

- ☐ **Be careful with smoking materials!** – Provide smokers with large, deep ashtrays. Wet cigarette butts and ashes before emptying ash trays into a wastebasket. Never smoke when you are lying down, drowsy, or in bed.
- ☐ **Home Heating** - Give space heaters space. Keep them at least three feet away from anything that can burn. Unplug heaters when you shut them off, leave your home or go to bed.
- ☐ **Electrical** – Unplug small appliances when not in use. Remember, extension cords should not be used in place of permanent wiring. Tripped circuit breakers should not be overlooked, they can be a sign of serious electrical problems.
- ☐ **Cooking** – Never leave cooking unattended. If a pan of food catches fire, slide a lid over it and turn off the burner.

2 Prepare- before fire strikes.

- ☐ **Inspections** – Regularly inspect rooms and buildings for fire hazards. Inspect exit doors and windows and make sure they are working properly.
- ☐ **Know Your Building's Fire Protection System** – Students should be familiar with the type of fire protection system in their building, including knowing the location of smoke alarms and whether the building is protected by fire sprinklers.
- ☐ **Smoke Alarms** – Install smoke alarms in every dormitory room and every level of housing facilities. Maintain and regularly test smoke alarms and fire alarm systems. Replace smoke alarm batteries every semester.
- ☐ **Develop and practice a home escape plan** – Create and update detailed floor plans of buildings, and make them available to emergency personnel, resident advisors and students. Conduct fire drills and practice escape routes and evacuation plans. Urge students to take each alarm seriously.

3 In Case of Fire – Know what to do.

- ☐ **Don't rush out** into the hallway. Feel the door. If it is hot, use another way out. If the door is cool, leave by the nearest exit.
- ☐ **If your building has a public announcement system**, listen carefully and follow directions.
- ☐ **Never use elevators in a fire.** Use the stairs. Close all doors behind you to slow fire spread.
- ☐ **Get out and stay out.** Go directly to your planned meeting place and stay there. If you think someone is trapped inside, notify the fire department.
- ☐ **Dial 9-1-1 from a phone in a safe location.** A trained telecommunicator will assess your needs and dispatch the appropriate emergency service to your location.
- ☐ **If you can't escape from your apartment**, stuff wet towels, sheets or clothes around the doors and vents to keep smoke out. Call the fire department and tell them where you are. If no smoke is coming into the room you're in, open a window slightly both at the top and at the bottom. Stay low and wave a bright cloth, towel or sheet out the window to signal your location.

References: Campus Firewatch www.campus-firewatch.com; U.S. Fire Administration Campus Fire Safety, www.usfa.fema.gov/public/cfs/campus